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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study investigates the effects of race and other demographic characteristics (age, marital status, number of children, number of dependent children, and job status) on the self-esteem of 144 black, white and latino female subjects. Predicted differences due to race were confirmed. Marital status and the interaction of marital status with race, marital status with dependent children, and marital status, race and dependent children were also found as significant. This paper includes a discussion of the conceptual and methodological difficulties in the study of self-esteem. (Author)

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG BLACK, WHITE, AND LATINO WOMEN

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This exploratory study was designed to investigate the effects of race and other demographic characteristics (age, marital status, number of children, number of dependent children, and job status) on the self-esteem of 144 black, white, and latino female subjects. Predicted differences due to race were confirmed. Marital status and the interaction of marital status x race, marital status x dependent children, and marital status x race x dependent children were also found as significant. Cultural factors and the conceptual and methodological difficulties in the study of self-esteem were discussed.

Self-esteem has become a major construct in the field of Psychology. Its impact on everyday behavior has been pointed out by a considerable number of investigators who view individuals' regard for themselves as responsible for a wide range of everyday behaviors. This range of behaviors varies from the ability to give and receive love (Rogers and Dzmond, 1954), to the ability to resist pressure to conform, (Janis, 1954) and even to better visual acuity (Veldman, 1970). The predominant theoretical orientations have been the symbolic interaction position (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) and the evaluative processes of one's capabilities. The former asserts that individuals' perceptions of the attitudes that significant others hold towards them shape their self-appraisal (Helper, 1955; Rosenberg, 1963). The latter indicates that the assessment of their capabilities contributes to their self-appraisal

[1]The competent collaboration of Ms. Joan Healy and Ms. Ulrike Wheeler is acknowledged.

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(Shrauger, 1970; Shrauger and Terbovic, 1976).

The bulk of these studies have used male subjects or have used male and female subjects but have failed to analyze the data separately. Sex comparisons of self-esteem have only emerged within the last decade (Lanza, 1970; Whitaker, 1973), but have shown contradictory results, adding little to our understanding of women's self-esteem.

Exploratory studies, such as the pioneer work of Coopersmith (1967) with boys, have been lacking. This scientific gap may be explained by the lesser status usually accorded to exploratory studies as compared to the higher regard conferred upon the more controlled type of investigations. The need for systematic studies of important variables to generate solid hypotheses for future research of the antecedents of self-esteem in women is still present.

This study is designed to (1) compare self-esteem across ethnic groups, and (2) find other demographic characteristics that may influence women's self-esteem.

Related cross-ethnic studies done with 9-17 year old girls (Attenborough and Zdep, 1973) have shown black girls as having significantly higher "self-image" than white girls, a finding not readily understood in terms of prevailing theoretical approaches. Daily observations of black, white, and latino women has led this researcher to believe that society at large does not constitute the "significant other" for the black woman. She seems to derive her feelings of self-worth from her traditional position as head of her household. This is not the case

for the latino woman who traditionally has not been the head of her household, and yet she has been subjected to the same societal discriminations as the black woman.

Based on the above considerations, the following hypotheses are advanced: (1) Main differences due to race are expected between the three ethnic groups, (2) Black women are expected to have higher self-esteem than white and latino women, (3) White women are expected to have higher self-esteem than latino women.

Method

Subjects

A total of 144 females residing in white, black, and latino low and middle class neighborhoods, in the south suburbs of Chicago, participated in this study. Spanish as a native language was the criterion used for participation as a latino subject.

Instruments

Self-esteem was measured by the California Personality Inventory Self-Acceptance Scale (CPI-SA) (Gough, 1969) and the Janis and Field Feelings of Inadequacy Inventory (JF Inventory) (Janis, 1954), selected because of their reported high correlation when compared with five other methods of assessing self-esteem. It was considered that these measurements "clearly form a cluster and seem to be tapping the same attribute" (Hamilton, 1971, p. 449). Both instruments were administered under the disguised names of "Cattel Interest Inventory" and "Raymond's Job Preference Questionnaire". The "Cattel Interest Inventory"

contained a total of 52 true and false questions, 34 belonging to the original CPI-SA Scale and 18 fillers, worded to produce the impression individual's interests were being measured. Scoring for the CPI-SA Scale was determined by the total number of correct "true" and "false" answers with one point assigned to each correct answer. Highest possible score was 34 with increasing scores denoting higher self-esteem. The "Raymond's Job Preference Questionnaire" comprised a total of 40 questions (Lickert-type 5-point scales), 23 belonging to the JF Inventory and 17 fillers selected from the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Edwards, 1954). Scoring for the JF Inventory was weighted by giving one point to a "very often" answer, 2 points for a "fairly often", 3 for "sometimes", 4 for "not very often", and 5 to a "practically never" response. Highest possible score was 115 with higher scores denoting higher self-esteem.

The latino subjects had access to either the English or the Spanish version of these instruments. A commercial Spanish version of the CPI-SA was used and a translation into Spanish of the JF Inventory was done using the back-translation method (Werner & Campbell, 1973).

Demographic characteristics regarding age, marital status, number of children, number of dependent children, subject's employment and job status were obtained by means of a cover sheet (Appendix B) attached to the self-esteem measuring instruments.

Procedure

Senior and graduate students in a Psychology of Women class went to black, white, and latino neighborhoods, recruiting subjects for participation in this study. Pairs of white-black students approached white and black subjects while this researcher, a latino, and her American assisstant approached the latino subjects. The following verbal instructions were given: "I am a student at Governors State University in the Psychology of Women class. As part of my class requirements I am participating in a study about women. Please fill out these questionnaires and let me know if you have any questions." Participating subjects were assigned an identification number and proctors were instructed to check all questionnaires to make sure subjects understood the instructions and all items were completed. A total of 200 questionnaires were filled in and sorted into 3 age categories: 18-30, 31-45, and 46 and over. Sixteen questionnaires, showing consecutive identification numbers from lowest to highest were taken from each age category for each ethnic group. A total of 144 subjects, 48 black, 48 white, and 48 latino constituted the final sample.

Results

The principal dependent measures of this study were mean scores on two self-esteem questionnaires obtained by female members of black, white, and latino ethnic groups. It was originally

hypothesized that (1) there would be significant differences in self-esteem due to race, (2) black women would have higher self-esteem than either the white or latino women, and (3) white women would have higher self-esteem than the latino women.

2 one way analyses of variance were conducted to compare main effect due to race among the three ethnic groups studied.

(1) The hypothesis of main differences due to race was generally confirmed. Significant main effects were found in the CPI-SA Scale ($F_{2,\ 141} = 7.55$, $p<.01$) and near significance in the JF Inventory ($F_{2,\ 141} = 2.76$, $p<.06$) (table 1). After regrouping the data into two cultural categories of English speaking and Spanish speaking subjects, significant main effects due to race in both dependent measures were obtained (CPI-SA, $F_{1,\ 142} = 13.64$, $p<.001$; JF Inventory, $F_{1,\ 142} = 5.54$, $p<.05$) (table 1, p. 7).

(2) The hypothesis of higher self-esteem of black women over white and latino women was partially confirmed. Orthogonal comparisons between means of self-esteem scores of black and white women revealed no significant differences, but comparisons of mean self-esteem scores between black and latino women were highly significant. (CPI-SA, $t_{141} = 2.61$, $p<.01$; JF Inventory, $t_{141} = 2.09$, $p<.03$) (table 2, p. 7).

(3) The hypothesis of higher self-esteem of white women over latino women was confirmed. Orthogonal comparisons showed highly significant differences in the self-esteem of white and latino women (CPI-SA, $t_{141} = 3.80$, $p<.001$; JF Inventory $t_{141} = 1.97$, $p<.05$).

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

SIMPLE MAIN EFFECTS

SUMMARY TABLE FOR CPI-SA AND JANIS AND FIELD SCORES

	CPI-SA			JANIS AND FIELD		
SOURCE	df	MS	F	df	MS	F
Race	2	102.28	7.55***	2	456.09	2.76*
Residual	141	13.54		141	165.25	
Total	143			143		
Culture	1	185.31	13.64***	1	910.25	5.54**
Residual	142	13.582		142	164.10	
Total	143			143		

*p<.05
**p<.05
***p<.01
***p<.001

TABLE 2

Orthogonal Comparisons between Race Categories

CPI-SA and Janis and Field Self-Esteem Scores

(only significant comparisons are included)

SOURCE	CPI-SA		JANIS AND FIELD	
	df	t-value	df	t-value
Contrast of Black and Latino Women	141	2.61***	141	2.09**
Contrast of White and Latino Women	141	3.80****	141	1.97*

*p .05, **p<.03, ***p<.01, ****p<.001

Additional statistical analysis considering the other demographic characteristics of age, marital status, number of children, dependent children, and job status (no employment, part time, and full time employment) yielded significant main effects due to marital status in the JF Inventory ($F_{3, 114} = 6.26$, $p<.001$). Significant two way interactions of race x marital status in the JF Inventory ($F_{6, 114} = 2.38$, $p<.03$) and tendency towards significence of race x dependent children in the CPI-SA ($F_{5, 114} = 2.10$, $p<.06$) were found. Also significant was a three way interaction of race x marital status x dependent children in the CPI-SA Scale ($F_{4, 114} = 3.21$, $p<.01$) (table 3).

TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance - Summary Table for CPI-SA and Janis and Field Scores x Race x Marital Status x Dependent Children

	CPI-SA			Janis and Field		
SOURCE	df	MS	F	df	MS	F
Race (A)	2	99.32	8.00**	2	528.18	3.78*
Marital Status (B)	3	4.76	n. s.	3	873.94	6.26***
Dep. Children (C)	3	8.11	n. s.	3	90.96	n. s.
A x B	6	7.47	n. s.	6	332.80	2.38**
A x C	5	26.16	2.108***	5	125.66	n. s.
B x C	6	13.45	n. s.	6	199.82	n. s.
A x B x C	4	39.93	3.218*	4	393.15	2.82*
Residual	114	12.411		114	139.40	
Total	143	14.783		143	169.31	

*$p<.01$
**$p<.001$
***Tendency towards significance, ($p<.06$)

*$p<.02$
**$p<.03$
***$p<.001$

A further analysis of the distribution of the JF Inventory mean scores by race and marital status revealed that among the white and black women the divorced women had the highest self-esteem scores across the other marital status categories.[2] Among the latinos the married women obtained the highest self-esteem scores. The separated women had the lowest scores in all ethnic groups. (Figure 1) (table 7, Appendix A).

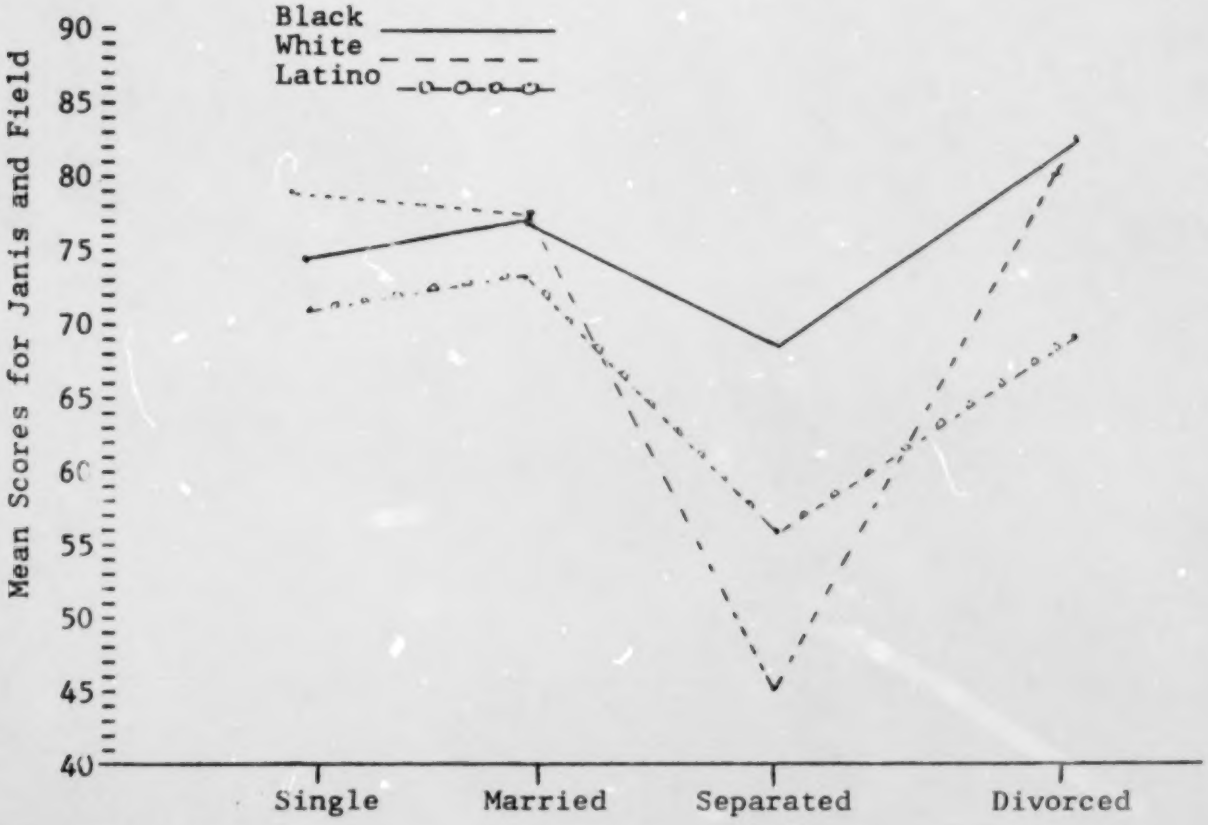

Figure 1 Distribution of Janis and Field Mean Scores By Race and Marital Status

[2] A widowed subject among the black women obtained the lowest self-esteem of all subjects across the three ethnic groups. Since this was our only subject reporting being a widow, the validity of her score as representative of widowed women is doubtful and consequently has not been counted in this analysis.

An analysis of the distribution of the JF Inventory mean scores by race and dependent children showed great variability for the latino women. White women's self-esteem scores changed little based on the number of dependent children. They showed greater self-esteem when having 1 or 2 children. Latino women's self-esteem went down with 1 and 2 dependent children but dramatically increased when having more than 3 dependent children. Black women's self-esteem slightly decreased after 3 and 4 dependent children but went up after 5 dependent children (table 8, Appendix A; figure 2).

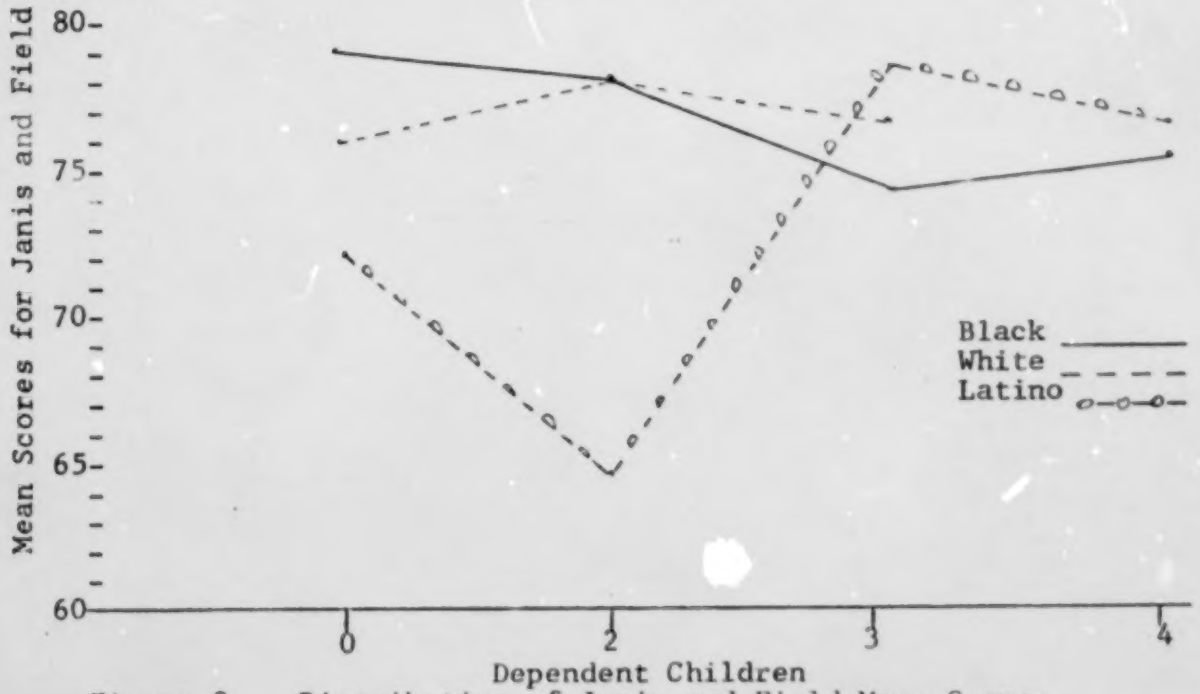

Figure 2 Distribution of Janis and Field Mean Scores By Race and Dependent Children

0 = No Dependent Children
2 = 1 and 2 Dependent Children
3 = 3 and 4 Dependent Children
4 = 5 or more Dependent Children

Discussion

The results of this investigation suggest areas for further research to identify variables affecting self-esteem in women. It also points to some conceptual and methodological difficulties. The lower self-esteem of latino women seems to reflect the influence of cultural variables not present in the other two ethnic groups considered. As a whole latino women have been taught to be more submissive and to see themselves as extensions of the important men in their lives. American women share some of this dependency, but not to the same extent as the latino women. Black women have been traditionally more independent as they frequently have been the heads of their households. This responsibility has probably helped black women develop feelings of self-worth, in spite of historical discrimination, as they perceive themselves crucial to the survival of their families.

Studies on significant others and sense of identity, across marital status, using American women as subjects, have shown women in non-traditional roles as having a higher sense of identity than those in traditional roles (O'Connel, 1974). These findings, together with the greater mean self-esteem scores obtained by our divorced subjects, (table 7, Appendix A, and figure 1, page 9) suggests autonomy as a possible variable to be investigated.

These findings concur with the results obtained when the data was studied considering marital status where the highest self-esteem was found among black and white women in the divorced

category. Being married doesn't seem as important to black and white women as it does to the latino women. The drop in self-esteem across ethnic categories for the separated women may be explained on basis of lack of defined status and consequent lack of prestige following a separation. In some cases, separation also entails loss of economic security; a possible explanation for the considerable loss of self-esteem in the latino group. Further studies taken into account length of time following separation are suggested to further understand the drop of self-esteem among separated women.

The little variability of self-esteem scores obtained by white women when the data was analyzed by number of dependent children reflects the population trend presently observed in the white culture where it is no longer popular to have large families. Having more than 2 children seems to produce a decline in the white woman's self-esteem, or perhaps more accurately, in her own feelings of adequacy. The opposite seems to be true in the case of latino women who suffer a marked decrease in self-esteem when having 1 and 2 dependent children but whose self-esteem goes up with the greater number of children. Black women's self-esteem goes down when having 3 and 4 children but goes up with 5 or more children. The possibility must be considered that each cultural group has an optimal number of dependent children desired and that any deviation from this cultural norm may produce changes in women's self-esteem. Studies to explore this connection and other possible socio-economic factors are needed.

In general, the interpretation that cultural factors, and not physical characteristics connected with race, may be responsible for differences in self-esteem has been demonstrated, particularly when our data was regrouped into English speaking and Spanish speaking categories. The differences obtained were even more significant than when race was used as the independent variable.

The somewhat different results obtained using our two measures of self-esteem points to the possibility that these two instruments, although significantly correlated (rho.38 $p<.001$) (rho .58 - Hamilton, 1971) may not be tapping the same variable. In spite of their general recognition as measures of self-esteem it may be more appropriate to call them measures of self-acceptance (CPI-SA) and feelings of adequacy (Janis and Field) rather than self-esteem. More caution may also be observed in our conceptualization of self-esteem which is presently being used by many investigators as synonymous with other psychological constructs such as self-concept and self-identity.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF CPI-SA AND JANIS AND FIELD SCORES FOR WHITE, BLACK, AND LATINO WOMEN

RACE	N	CPI-SA		JANIS AND FIELD	
		MEAN	S. D.	MEAN	S. D.
WHITE	48	20.73	4.04	77.46	13.50
BLACK	48	19.83	3.66	77.77	11.55
LATINO	48	17.88	3.30	72.29	13.42
$F_{2, 141}$		7.5526		2.7600	
p		<.01		n.s.	

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF CPI-SA AND JANIS AND FIELD SCORES FOR ENGLISH SPEAKING AND SPANISH SPEAKING WOMEN

CULTURE	N	CPI-SA		JANIS AND FIELD	
		MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.
ENGLISH SPEAKING	96	20.28	3.86	77.63	12.50
SPANISH SPEAKING	48	17.88	3.30	72.29	13.42
$F_{1, 142}$		13.64		5.55	
p		<.001		<.05	

TABLE 5

Distribution of Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations
of CPI - SA Scores based on
Age of Black, White, and Latino Women

AGE / RACE	18 - 30 Years			31 - 45 Years			46 & over		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
White	16	19.31	3.95	16	22.69	4.60	16	20.19	2.81
Black	16	19.94	3.82	16	19.38	4.37	16	20.19	2.83
Latino	16	18.13	2.96	16	17.06	3.73	16	18.44	3.20

TABLE 6

Distribution of Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations
of Janis & Field Scores based on
Age of Black, White, and Latino Women

AGE / RACE	18 - 30 Years			31 - 45 Years			46 & over		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
White	16	77.75	13.10	16	75.56	12.06	16	79.13	15.72
Black	16	77.88	12.33	16	78.38	11.84	16	77.06	11.16
Latino	16	73.19	11.51	16	70.25	14.24	16	73.44	14.92

TABLE 7

Distribution of Janis and Field Mean Scores
By Race and Marital Status

	Marital Status														
	Single			Married			Separated			Divorced			Widowed		
Race	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
WHITE	12	79.00	16.29	31	78.45	10.19	2	46.00	15.55	3	82.33	9.29			
BLACK	15	74.80	14.01	25	78.76	8.89	3	70.33	14.57	4	83.00	10.23	1	59.43	--
LATINO	14	71.85	15.79	30	73.66	11.85	2	56.50	10.60	2	70.50	21.92			
Totals	41	75.02	15.02	86	76.87	10.60	7	59.42	15.88	9	80.00	12.24	1	59.43	--

* Validity of the "Widow" as the lowest self-esteem category is doubtful due to the limitation of the sample.

TABLE 8

Distribution of Janis and Field Mean Scores
By Race and Dependent Children

Race	Dependent Children											
	No Children			1 and 2 Children			3 and 4 Children			More than 5 Children		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
WHITE	21	76.52	16.18	17	78.64	10.89	10	77.50	12.41			
BLACK	13	79.07	12.13	22	78.77	10.07	11	74.72	14.85	2	75.00	2.82
LATINO	30	72.73	13.64	9	65.00	12.56	5	79.00	15.41	4	77.00	4.76

APPENDIX B

GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY

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Please read the questions below and answer them honestly and openly. No name is necessary.

Age: ☐ 18-30 ☐ 30-45 ☐ 46 and over

Marital Status:

☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Separated ☐ Single
☐ Widowed ☐ Other

How many children do you have?_____

How many of these children are dependent upon you?_____ _____

Job Status:

Are you presently employed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what type of work do you do?_____

_____

_____

☐ Part Time ☐ Full Time